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blunt answer to Arsinoé (lines 1716-22). The typical scene for the intensely personal assertion of Alcestis is the one known as the scene of the chairs, the fifth of the second act. It is impossible to identify the irritable, censorious, angry lover with a misanthropist. He is atrabilious, and the title of *an ill-tempered man in love* fits him exactly, but he is not a misanthropist. His intense interest in the lady he loves, as well as the sarcasm of his speech, due to keen observation and unpleasant personal experience, mark him as a man who cannot but interest us, with whom we might argue, fall out and become reconciled again, but a man whom we cannot help considering worthy of our friendly regard, a type of a fine character who only needs the experience of life to wear off his rough edges.

Alcestis himself has told us that *la raison n'est pas ce qui règle l'amour* (line 248). He knows his faults and admits:

La raison, pour mon bien, veut que je me retire:
Je n'ai point sur ma langue un assez grand empire.
(Lines 1573-74.)

But one does not turn misanthropic because of such defects.

In his reference to court-life, the poet himself seems to unburden himself:

"Le ciel ne m'a point fait, en me donnant le jour,
Une âme compatible avec l'air de la cour."
(1083-84.)

He gives his reason:

Être franc et sincère est mon plus grand talent;
Je ne sais point jouer les hommes en parlant;
Et qui n'a pas le don de cacher ce qu'il pense
Doit faire en ce pays fort peu de résidence.
(1087-90.)

He speaks farther on (l. 1095) of the *mille rebuts cruels* which one has to endure at court, and the remark is very significant, but the remedy is too simple to justify misanthropy.

As to the parts in which Alcestis speaks more or less passionately to Célimène, some of them were taken from *Dom Garcie*, and hence had been written a year before he married Armande Béjard. The new play shows that the principal topic of the older has been retained, but it has been deepened and varied. The hero in *Dom Garcie* suffers from imaginary torments, those of Alcestis are real. It nevertheless remains true—and in this is shown the deep insight and the profound art of the poet—that Alcestis suffers only in proportion to the real faults which he has and shows. But it is impossible to admit that a man like him, if we judge of him as he appears throughout the

play, should not be able to get rid of these faults eventually. He might then still resent the misery of human nature at court and elsewhere, but he would not allow his indignation to turn into the *vinaigre* of misanthropy.

We must, therefore, conclude that the play answers to the title *Un Atrabilaire Amoureux*, and that Molière changed this title only because of the mental and moral suffering which he underwent during its composition. His artistic sense and tact have prevented him from exaggerating the gloomy features of his hero, and from imbuing the latter with an excess of the feelings which at times possessed the poet, but these feelings account for the fact that a tragical element entered the piece through the contrast between the ideality which exists in the virtues and the views of its hero, and the world in which he lives. This element is mitigated, in accordance with the requirements of comedy, by the faults and foibles of the hero whose misanthropy is only temporary and cannot be regarded as final.

The most pathetic feature of the play is in the condition of the feelings of Alcestis towards Célimène. He loves her too deeply to be otherwise than profoundly unhappy while separated from her. He loves her exactly as the poet loved Armande, and the poet's wretchedness is mirrored in the misfortune of his hero. But as a union with a pronounced flirt may not be the best thing for a lover, our sympathy with his condition is not stronger than is consistent with the legitimate purposes of comedy. The poet has shown himself an incomparable artist in so adjusting the different characters of his play, and the elements in these characters, as to challenge the admiration of every student of the drama.

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DANTE'S INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH POETRY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.¹

"A great poem is a fountain forever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence, which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight." Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*.

It may be a matter of some surprise for those who have not had their attention called to the

¹ *Dante's Influence on Shelley* has already been discussed by the writer in MOD. LANG. NOTES, Vol. xiii (1898), No. 6.

fact, to learn how far back the influence of Dante on English literature extends. Chaucer translated and imitated a number of passages of the *Divine Comedy*; there is frequent mention of the great Florentine by the poets of the Sixteenth Century; while Milton's debt to his predecessor in the religious epic has already been pointed out by the writer.

The great Dante period in England, however, begins with the first decade of the Nineteenth Century. Since that time translation after translation of the *Divine Comedy* has been made; famous essays have been written by Carlyle, Macaulay, Lowell; substantial contributions to scholarship have been made by Lord Vernon, Barlow, Moore, Norton, and others.

The cause of this outburst of interest in Dante is, perhaps, not hard to find. One of the striking characteristics of modern literature is the interest it manifests in the literary products of Mediæval Europe. The treasures of the Middle Ages have been brought to light after the oblivion of centuries. In Germany the *Nibelungenlied*, in France the *Chanson de Roland*, in England the *Beowulf*, have been eagerly studied and, by some at least, ardently admired.

Italy can hardly be said to have a mediæval literature. Modern Italian sprang, Minerva-like, full-grown from the brain of Dante. It is hard to believe that the *Divine Comedy* was written fifty years before *Piers Plowman's Vision*, and only a few years later than the *Nibelungenlied* and the *Roman de la Rose*. Italy, then, had only Dante to offer, and the *Divine Comedy* has not been, in our own century, merely read, as in the case of Chaucer and Milton, but studied in all the multiplicity of its details. In view, then, of the profound interest manifested in Dante, of the popularization of his works by means of translations, lectures and essays, it is not surprising to find his influence on poetry far greater than ever before.

It is no exaggeration to say that scarcely a single great or secondary poet of the century in England is ignorant of the *Divine Comedy*. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, among the minor poets, shows this influence most. The son of a distinguished Dante scholar living in England, he drew inspiration from childhood up. Through his whole career his Dante-worship asserted itself, not only in poetry, but in painting as well. Not only did he translate the

New Life and a number of lyrical poems of Dante and his contemporaries, but he shows a vast influence of Dante in his pictures, of which a large number were inspired by scenes and incidents from the life and work of the great Florentine. Sir Noel Paton says of his masterpiece—*Dante's Dream*—that "fifty years hence it will be named among the half-dozen supreme pictures of the world."

Leigh Hunt expanded (and thus spoilt) the exquisite episode of Francesca da Rimini, and good old common-place Samuel Rogers, in his *Italy*, alludes to the story of the *Sasso di Dante*,

"that ancient seat,
The seat of stone that runs along the wall,
South of the Church, east of the belfry-tower
Where,

"in the sultry time
Would Dante sit conversing, and with those
Who little thought that in his hand he held
The balance, and assigned at his good pleasure
To each his place in the invisible world."

Mrs. Browning in *Casa Guidi Windows* (written in *terza rima*) alludes to the same tradition, only in deeper and tenderer language,

O passionate
Poor Dante, who, a banished Florentine,
Didst sit austere at banquets of the great
And muse upon this far-off stone of thine,
And think how oft some passer used to wait
A moment in the golden day's decline,
With "good-night, dearest Dante."—Well, good night!
I muse now, Dante, and think, verily,
Though chapelled in the byeway, out of sight,
Ravenna's bones would thrill with ecstasy,
Could'st know thy favorite stone's elected right
As tryst-place for thy Tuscans to foresee
Their earliest chartas from.

The minuteness of Mrs. Browning's acquaintance with the *Divine Comedy* is shown by a stanza of *A Child's Grave* at Florence,—

A Tuscan lily,—only white
As Dante, in abhorrence
Of red corruption, wished aright
The lilies of his Florence.

Where the reference in the last two lines is to the passage in the sixteenth canto of the *Paradise*,

tanto che il giglio
Non era ad asta mai posto a ritroso,
Nè per division fatto vermiglio.²

Among the great poets of the century Coleridge, who practically introduced German literature into England,—was likewise one of the first to appreciate the greatness of Dante, and

² The ancient arms of Florence were a white lily on a red field. After the war with Pistoja in 1251 the Guelphs made their arms a red lily on a white field, while the Ghibellines retained the old device.

he was largely instrumental in spreading a knowledge of the Italian poet in England. He gave lectures on him, and it was through a eulogistic mention of his in one of these that the first impulse was given to the popularity of Cary's well-known version of the *Divine Comedy*. Coleridge refers several times to Dante in his prose works. In the *Anima Poetæ* he calls the eighteenth *canzone* of Dante,—“a poem of wild and interesting images intended as an enigma,—and to me an enigma it remains spite of all my efforts;”—and twelve years later he says:—

“I begin to understand the above poem after an interval from 1805, during which no year passed in which I did not peruse, I might say construe, parse and spell it, twelve times at least, such a fascination it had for me, in spite of its obscurity.”

It is undoubtedly the truth that no English poet before Coleridge had given to Dante so much careful and persistent study; and in this respect he is the forerunner of many other poets of the succeeding years, Shelley, Browning, Tennyson. The body of Coleridge's poetry is so small that we can hardly expect to find much trace of direct influence on the part of Dante.

Wordsworth in one of his letters says, “the poetry of Dante and Michel Angelo proves that if there is little majesty and strength in the Italian tongue, the fault is in the authors and not in the language.”

He mentions him twice besides in his letters, and praises him highly in his sonnet to Florence,—in which after referring to the *Sasso di Dante*,—

“A marble stone,
The laurell'd Dante's favorite seat,”

he speaks of him as “the mighty poet” who bore in his breast,

“A Patriot's heart, warm with undying fire.”

Again in the well-known sonnet on the sonnet, after speaking of the use made of this form of poetry by Shakspeare, Petrarch, Tasso, Camoëns, he adds,—

The sonnet glittered a gay myrtle leaf
Amid the cypress with which Dante crowned
His visionary brow.

There is a certain perfunctoriness about these references, however, and in general Wordsworth shows but little trace of Dante's influence in his poetry. Nor, indeed, could it well be otherwise. The high-priest of Nature-worship, narrow as he was in many respects, could scarcely take much from the poet who

lived in an age when the modern view of Nature was absolutely unknown.³

Keats did not read Dante in the original, but seems to have read him to some extent in Cary's translation, a copy of which, with the best passages marked he gave to Miss Brawn.

He was especially filled with admiration for the episode of Francesca da Rimini. In a letter to Fanny Brawn he writes:—

“The fifth Canto of Dante pleases me more and more; it is that one in which he meets Paulo (*sic*) and Francesca. I had passed many days in rather a low state of mind, and in the midst of them I dreamt of being in that region of Hell. The dream was one of the most delightful enjoyments of my life. . . . I tried a sonnet on it; there are fourteen lines in it, but nothing of what I felt. Oh, that I could dream every night.”

The sonnet, written in the back of the copy of Cary, mentioned above, tells how, in sleep, his spirit fled away,

Not to pure Ida with its snow-cold skies,
Nor unto Tempe where Jove grieved a day,
But to that second circle of sad Hell,
Where in the gust, the whirlwind, and the flaw
Of rain and hail-stones, lovers need not tell
Their sorrows,—pale were the sweet lips I saw,
Pale were the lips I kissed, and fair the form
I floated with, about that melancholy storm.

As may be inferred from Keats' remarks on Dante given above, he was neither old enough, strong enough in character, nor scholar enough to appreciate the deeper meaning and beauty of the *Divine Comedy*.

It was chiefly as a critic that Matthew Arnold uses Dante. His admiration for him was profound, and he gives constant expression to it throughout his essays. In his essay on a *French Critic on Milton* he couples Dante with the great Greeks, and with Vergil and Milton,—as a “great artist in style.” In the *Essay on Translating Homer* he admires Dante's “allusive and compressed manner,” and contrasts his “inversion and pregnant conciseness” with the “directness and flowingness” of Homer; while in accordance with his usual custom he keeps reiterating the phrase “grand style,” of which Dante is always cited as a great Master. He takes what he calls “eminent specimens” of this “grand style,” from Homer, Vergil, and

³ How far from a genuine appreciation of Dante's stupendous genius Wordsworth was, may be seen in his remark, that “Ariosto and Tasso are very absurdly depressed in order to elevate Dante.” Few critics of the present day would put these three poets in the same class, as was once the custom.

Milton, and joins thereto the following lines from the *Inferno* (xvi 61),

Lascio lo fele, e vo pei dolci pomi
Promessi a me per lo verace Duca;
Ma fino al centro pria convien ch'io tomi.

In similar manner, in the *Study of Poetry* (published originally as the general introduction to Ward's *English Poets*) he quotes from the supreme poets of the world examples of the "σπουδαίουτης, the high and excellent seriousness, which Aristotle assigns as one of the grand virtues of poetry," lines which may serve as a touchstone, by means of which we can test all poetry. "Take," says Mr. Arnold, "that incomparable line and a-half of Dante, Ugolino's tremendous words,"

Io no piangeva; sì dentro impietrai;
Piangevan elli; . . .

and the lovely words of Beatrice to Vergil,

Io son fatta da Dio, sua mercè, tale,
Che la vostra miseria non mi tange,
Nè fiamma d'esto incendio non m'assale. . . .

take the simple but perfect line,

In la sua voluntade è nostra pace.

"These few lines," adds Mr. Arnold, "are enough even of themselves to keep clear and sound our judgments about poetry."

Matthew Arnold must have been deeply influenced in mind, character, views of life, and poetic feeling by his intense admiration of, and thorough acquaintance with Dante's poetry. Yet in his case this influence is so general, so pervasive, that it is difficult to indicate in his poetry any particular passage to which a direct parallel may be found in Dante. Such reminiscences as in the line,—

The rustle of the eternal rain of love,

and such casual references as are found in the sonnet on the Austerity of Poetry, and the poem on Heine's tomb, are of no particular value in this respect, and the full extent of Dante's influence on the bard of religious questionings can only be estimated by a consideration of his critical judgments and the general attitude of his mind.

Byron's love for Italy is well-known. Again and again her beauty, her unhappiness, her wrongs are referred to in his poetry, and many of his lines, such as

Italia! oh Italia! thou who hast
The fatal gift of beauty, which became
A funeral dower of present woes and past, etc.

have become stock quotations.

His acquaintance with the Italian language and literature began while at school at Harrow, and was continued later at Cambridge, al-

though it was not until 1809 that he learned to speak the language. In 1813 he writes in his diary,—"I hope to settle in Italy or the East and drink deep of the literature and language of both." He became acquainted with Dante's *Inferno* early; in a letter dated 1806, he writes,—"or rather let me invoke the shade of Dante to inspire me, for none but the author of the *Inferno* could properly preside over such an attempt."

In the three books of the *Corsair* (1814) he takes as mottoes passages from the story of Francesca da Rimini in the *Inferno*. It would seem that up to this date, he knew neither the *Purgatorio* nor the *Paradiso*; which being far more difficult and less popular than the *Inferno*, would naturally be learned later.

Byron speaks very highly of Dante, both in his letters, conversations, and poetry. He often compared his own life to that of Dante. There is a vast difference, however, between the romantic melancholy of Childe Harold's exile from his native shores, and the bitter sorrows of the exiled Florentine. On one occasion, we are told by Moore, Byron indignantly repudiated the criticism of Schlegel that Dante was hard-hearted.

"Gentle feelings? And Francesca da Rimini, and the father's feelings in Ugolino? and Beatrice and La Pia? Why there is gentleness in Dante beyond all gentleness when he is tender. And Dante's heaven is all love and glory and majesty."

Again he says,

"I don't wonder at the enthusiasm of the Italians about Dante. He is the poet of liberty. Persecution, exile, the dread of a foreign grave, could not shake his principles. There is no Italian gentleman, scarcely any well-educated girl, that has not all the finer passages at the finger's end; particularly the Ravennese. The Guiccioli, for instance, can almost repeat any part of the *Divine Comedy*."

And yet I doubt whether Byron had anything like so deep and genuine an enthusiasm for Dante as Shelley had. In several passages he seems not to regard him more highly as a poet than Tasso, Ariosto, or even Boccaccio. Thus in *Childe Harold*, speaking of Tasso, he says,

"Great as thou art yet paralleled by those
Thy countrymen, before thee born to shine,
The bards of hell and chivalry: first rose
The Tuscan father's comedy divine;
Then not unequal to the Florentine,
The southern Scott, etc.

Again describing the church of Santa Croce, the Westminster Abbey of Florence, he breaks out,—

But where repose the all Etruscan three
Dante and Petrarch and scarce less than they,
The bard of prose, creative spirit, he
Of the hundred tales of love.

Like so many other English poets,—Chaucer, Milton, Grey, Shelley,—Byron tried his hand at translating Dante. Of the two famous episodes of the *Inferno*, the Ugolino had been translated no less than three times,—by Chaucer, by Gray, and by Shelley (or rather Medwin). Byron was the first to translate the passage containing the story of Francesca da Rimini, those lines which Walter Savage Landor called the most perfect in the whole range of poetry. This translation was done in March, 1820, in the original metre, *terza rima*, "third rhyme" as Byron calls it, adding "I have done it into cramp English, line for line and rhyme for rhyme."

References to Dante are not infrequent throughout the body of Byron's poetry. In the *Age of Bronze*, Verona is spoken of with its Amphitheatre,—

Where Romans sate,
And Dante's exile sheltered by thy gate.

In the *Childe Harold* the references are quite numerous. Thus as we have already seen Dante's great poem is called

The Tuscan father's comedy divine,
and a little further on in the same Canto he apostrophizes the Poet's native city,—

"Ungrateful Florence! Dante sleeps afar,
Like Scipio, buried by the uprising sea;
Thy factions, in this worse than civil war
Proscribed the bard, whose name forevermore
Their children's children would in vain adore
With the remorse of ages."

The description of the waterfall of Velino contains undoubted allusion to the mighty fall of the Phlegethon over the tremendous precipice which separates the seventh from the eighth circle of the *Inferno*,—

The hell of waters! Where they howl and hiss,
And boil in endless torture; while the sweat
Of their great agony, wrung out from this
Their Phlegethon, etc.

So, too, the metaphor drawn from the broken pieces of a mirror,

Even as a broken mirror, which the glass
In every fragment multiplies; and makes
A thousand images of one that was,
The same, and still the more, the more it breaks,—

is like the illustration used by Vergil to prove that in respect to the love of God, "Giving doth not impoverish nor withholding enrich,"

E quanta gente più lassù s'intende,
Più v'è da bene amare, e più vi s'ama,
E come specchio l'uno all'altro rende.

Purg. xv, 73 ff.

Even in *Don Juan*, that extraordinary work of genius at odds with the world, in which life and death, love and sorrow, nature and man, are fused with consummate skill with satire, cynicism, profanity and immorality, we find a number of references to Dante. In Canto ii, the boat of starving shipwrecked people approaches the shore,—

Like Charon's bark of spectres dull and pale.

In Canto iv he tells us,—

I pass each day where Dante's bones are laid:
A little cupola, more neat than solemn.

So, too, in the scene in the Harem, Duda whose shriek has aroused all the denizens of the dormitory, tells how she had dreamed of walking in a wood,—

A "wood obscure," like that where Dante found
Himself in at the age when all grow good;

The allusion in the last line is, of course, to the

Mezzo del cammin di nostra vita,

with which the *Inferno* begins. The same reference is repeated in the tenth Canto,

But getting nigh grim Dante's "obscure wood,"
That hateful equinox, etc.

The famous inscription over the gate to hell, is quoted in part in Canto xvi, where the door,

Opened with a most infernal creak,
Like that of hell,—"*Lasciate ogni speranza*
Vo ich 'entrate." The hinge seemed to speak,
Dreadful as Dante's rhima (*sic*) or this stanza.

As may be seen from the above quotations there is but little of the solemnity, or pathos, or "high seriousness" of Dante in the use made by Byron of the *Divine Comedy*. Nor could it be otherwise. The whole temper, style and genius of Byron was more akin to that of Ariosto than to that of Dante. In the *Don Juan* the Romanticism of the day is treated with the same irony as that with which Chivalry is treated in the *Orlando Furioso*.

With Byron, however, this irony often degenerates into bitter and savage jibes at all things: holy and sacred. Even the story of Ugolino, with its terrible pathos, is flippantly used as a cynical excuse for cannibalism on the part of the shipwrecked sailors,—

And if Pedrillo's head should shocking be,

Remember Ugolino condescends
To eat the head of his arch-enemy,
The moment after he politely ends

His tale; if foes be food in hell, at sea

'Tis surely fair to dine upon a friend,
When shipwreck's short allowance grows too scanty,
Without being much more horrible than Dante.

In similar manner Beatrice, whose apotheosis by Dante, is according to Shelley, "the most glorious imagination of modern poetry," is sneeringly coupled with Petrarch's Laura and

Milton's Eve to prove the truth of the cynical proposition,

That love and marriage rarely can combine.

Byron was wont to declare that he was more attached to Ravenna than to any other place except Greece. He lived there more than two years. Undoubtedly his connection with the countess of Guiccioli had a great deal to do with this attachment. In this, the city of Dante's last days and death, this

Happier Ravenna on *whose* hoary shore,
Fortress of falling Empire! honored sleeps
The immortal exile,—

the influence of the Italian on the English poet made itself especially felt,—an influence which Rogers alludes to in his lines on Ravenna,

that Place
Of old renown, once in the Adrian sea,
Ravenna! where from Dante's sacred tomb
He had so oft, as many a verse declares,
Drawn inspiration."

It was here that the *Prophecy of Dante* was composed in 1819. It was dedicated to the Countess Guiccioli, who describes the origin of its composition:—

"He came in January, 1819, arriving at Ravenna on the day of the festival of corpus domini. Being deprived at this time of his books, his horses, and all that occupied him at Venice, I begged him to gratify me by writing something on the subject of Dante, and with his usual good nature and rapidity he composed his *Prophecy*."

The poem is in *terza rima* and consists of four cantos. He had planned more, but never finished them. The cantos are short, approximating in the number of lines to those of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In sending it to Mr. Murray, he called it the best thing he had ever done,—“if not unintelligible.” In the Preface we are told that

“the reader is requested to suppose that Dante addresses him in the interval between the conclusion of the *Divine Comedy* and his death, and shortly before the latter event, foretelling the fortunes of Italy in general in the ensuing centuries.”

In the first canto Dante alludes to his own poem, just finished, speaks of his wrongs, his exile, his loneliness, and his yearning to return to Florence, the

bello ovile, ov'io dormii agnello.

In the prophecy proper there are allusions to the wars, calamities, discoveries of Italy, to her triumph in poetry and painting and sculpture,—allusions to the sack of Rome, the voyage of Columbus and Cabot, to Petrarch, Tasso, Ariosto and Michel Angelo.

While a strong and impressive poem, the *Prophecy of Dante* is not much like the great poet in whose name it is written either in general temper or language. The long sentences, the number of adjectives and the long drawn-out metaphors are unlike the noble simplicity, the unparalleled conciseness of Dante, his unique use of verb and noun as almost the only means with which to produce his effect. So, too, the whole atmosphere of the poem is romantic. Byron makes Dante dwell on his wrongs, and his bitterness and melancholy, his hopes of revenge, seem more like the character of Childe Harold than the stern, proud-hearted exile, with his reserve in speaking of his own sufferings, which when they do appear seem to burst forth irresistibly for a moment's space of time, then are crowded back. The *Weltschmerz* of nineteenth century romanticism has no place in the heart of Dante Alighieri.

Byron sometimes makes Dante utter things which he never could have said. Thus the line,

There where the furthest suns and stars have birth,
could scarcely have been written by one whose knowledge of the universe was confined within the narrow limits of the Ptolemaic system. So, too, Dante in his ignorance of Greek could not have made the references, attributed to him by Byron, to the pebbles of Demosthenes and the torments of Prometheus.

In looking over the previous discussion the reader will perceive that it is chiefly as the poet of liberty, the forerunner of a united Italy, the patriot, whose principles neither “persecution, exile, nor the dread of a foreign grave could shake,” that Byron looks upon Dante. Thus in the *Prophecy*, after praising Columbus, Petrarch, Michel Angelo, he adds,

More than these illustrations shall be,

The mortal Savior who shall set thee free.

The other phases of Dante's character and his poetry, the deep, religious feeling and mystical spirituality, Byron was not fitted by nature to appreciate; and, consequently, they are absent from his poetry.

A story is told by Edward Fitzgerald to the effect that looking one day with Tennyson at two busts of Dante and Goethe in a shop-window in Regent street, he said, “What is there wanting in Goethe which Dante had?” To which the Poet Laureate answered, “The Divine.”

Tennyson's own modest estimate of himself

in comparison with the Florentine poet is expressed in the *Lines to Dante*, written on the occasion of the Dante Centenary, 1865, at the request of the Florentines:

King, that hast reign'd six hundred years, and grown
In power, and ever growest, since thine own
Fair Florence honoring thy nativity,
Thy Florence now the crown of Italy,
Hath sought the tribute of a verse from me,
I, wearing but the garland of a day,
Cast at thy feet one flower that fades away.

This same sentiment was expressed fifteen years later to Canon Warburton, to whom the poet was talking of the probably short-lived duration of all modern poetical fame. "Who," said he, "will read Alfred Tennyson one hundred years hence? And look at Dante after six hundred years!"⁴

Tennyson is said to have loved to "troll and thunder out" Italian poetry, much of which he knew by heart; and the influence of so acute a critic and so profound an admirer of the *Divine Comedy* as his friend Hallam must have strengthened the poet's admiration for Dante's genius. Without doubt the great Florentine was among the poets spoken of in the Stanza of *In Memoriam*,

Oh bliss, when all in circle drawn
About him, heart and ear were fed
To hear him, as he lay and read
The Tuscan poets on the lawn.

We may assume on *a priori* grounds that the consummate artist in the use of language and rhythm would find intense satisfaction in the extraordinary powers of Dante in these respects. Indeed, Tennyson's fastidiousness in the use of sounds was so great that even the musical Italian, and that, too, in the hands of Dante, does not escape his criticism. In the *Memoir*, by his son, we find the following passage:

"My father expressed the view that, 'as the English language is much finer than the Italian for variety of sound, so Milton for sound is often finer than Dante.' 'What, for example, can be more monotonous than the first lines of the *Inferno* with their *a-s*?'

Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
Chè la diritta via era smarrita,

and so on."

While there seem at first thought to be no points of comparison between the *In Memoriam* and the *Divine Comedy*, yet the fact that each, while being the experience of the poet himself, yet seeks to represent the feelings of the whole human race, may be due not merely

⁴ It seems he had quite forgotten the lines quoted above. See the *Memoir* by his son, vol. 2, p. 256.

to coincidence. Indeed, Tennyson himself seems to point to at least some kind of connection between the two, when he says, of his own poem,

"it is rather the cry of the whole human race than mine. In the poem altogether private grief swells out into thought of and hope for the whole world. It begins with a funeral and ends in praise of a new life. A sort of *Divine Comedy*, cheerful at the close."

In *Locksley Hall* occur the well-known lines, Comfort? Comfort scorn'd of devils! this is true the poet sings,

That a sorrow's crown of sorrows is remembering happier things,

and in *The Palace of Art*, among the "paintings of wise men" which the poet hung

The royal dais round,

was one in which

the world-worn Dante grasp'd his song
And somewhat grimly smiled.

The four brief lines of Dante, which give concisely the tragic story of Pia de' Tolomei,' (lines which could be expanded to a novel) are said to have suggested *Mariana in the South*. There are several parallels in language and metaphor between Tennyson and Dante which are interesting. Thus in the *Palace of Art*, there is a very evident imitation in the lines,

Plato the wise and large-browed Verulam
The first of those who know,

of Dante's designation of Aristotle as

il maestro di color che sanno, . . .

and the metaphor drawn from driving one's

. . . heel into the smoulder'd log
That sent a blast of sparks up the flue

recalls the figure of Dante,

Come nel percoter dei ciocchi arsi
Surgono innumerabili faville,
(*Par.* xviii, 100.)

by means of which he describes the streaming of the soul-lights in the heaven of Jupiter.

Most striking of all these parallels, however, is that between the fine line of Tennyson,

The one divine far-off event
To which the whole creation moves,

and those of Dante in which the will of God,

è quel mare, al qual tutto si move
Ciò ch'ella crea e che natura face.
(*Par.* iii, 86.)

No one who has read the strange story told by Ulysses to Dante, in the eighth *bolgia* of Hell, of his voyage into the mysterious waters of the untraveled Atlantic, and his shipwreck near the mysterious mountain that rose sheer from the sea, can fail to recognize the resemblance between this passage and Tennyson's poem.

Homer, according to the line in the *Odyssey* (xi, 135), seems to imply that Ulysses died at home of a natural death. Dante follows another tradition, accepted by Pliny and Solinus, according to which Ulysses undertook a second voyage and founded the city of Lisbon. The details of the voyage and the wretched fate of Ulysses, were probably the invention of the poet. However this may be, the whole temper of Tennyson's poem, the weariness of the old mariner at a life of inactivity, his desire to spend his few remaining years in stirring adventures, his setting sail with his old companions, who, like him, are ready to die in the quest of the unknown world beyond the setting sun, all this is due entirely to Dante. Even in the language there are constant reminiscences of the Italian poet, the "untravell'd world" and "to sail beyond the sunset" of Tennyson, being the "mondo senza gente," and the "diretro al sol" of the *Divine Comedy*.

Of all English poets, none had a broader, deeper, more personal affection for Italy than Robert Browning:

Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it, "Italy."
Such lovers old are I and she,
So it was always, so shall ever be!

Her history, her natural beauty, her art, her literature, the storied monuments of her past, all find expression in his poetry.

We need not be surprised, then, to find that Browning was deeply impressed by the genius of the greatest of the Italian poets. While he does not show the influence of Dante in his poems to so great an extent as Shelley, or even Byron, yet there can be little doubt that he had as full an understanding of him, and as deep and intelligent a love for him as either of these.

There is casual mention of Dante in some of his shorter poems, while in *Fifine at the Fair*, the frequently expressed surprise of the spirits in the *Divine Comedy* at the breathing of Dante is alluded to in the following lines:

In all Descents to Hell whereof I ever read
As when a phantom there, made enemy or friend,
Or merely stranger-shade, is struck, is forced suspend
His passage: "You that breathe, along with us the ghosts.
Here, why must it be still a woman that accosts?"

We might expect to find in the *Ring and the Book*, if anywhere in Browning's works, some traces of the influence of Dante. Yet in actual fact, there is but little; a few brief mentions,

I doubt much if Marino really be
A better bard than Dante after all;

and a few lines, evidently reminiscent of the *Divine Comedy*, such as,

Horrible worms made out of sweat and tears.⁵

So, too, the origin of Caponsacchi's family in Fiesole, and their settling late in Florence, near the "Old Mercato," is referred to much in the same language as in the *Paradiso*.

The personal religious element of Dante, his indomitable optimism in the midst of sorrows and wrongs such as fall to the lot of few men, his unfaltering belief that the evils of the life that now is will be compensated for in the life that is to come, appealed strongly to the essentially religious temperament of Browning. In the days of his own bitter sorrow for the death of her who had been the great blessing of his life, he found consolation in the beautiful words of Dante, in which the latter affirms his certainty of seeing Beatrice again in the other world.

In a letter to a lady (who wrote to him when dying, to thank him for the help she had received from *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, and *Abt Vogler*) he wrote as follows:

"Or, not to multiply instances, as when Dante wrote what I will transcribe from my wife's Testament wherein I recorded it fourteen years ago:—'Thus I believe, thus I affirm, thus I am certain it is, that from this life I shall pass to another, better, there, where that lady lives, of whom my soul was enamoured.'"

The strong character of Dante was especially adopted to attract Browning; and it was not merely the poet but the man whom he admired. All through Browning's poetry we see that the themes which he loved to discuss, were those in which strength and force of will and character show themselves.

I count life just a stuff

To try the soul's strength on, educe the man,

Who keeps one end in view makes all things serve.

Even in evil-doing, it is better to be strong than weak, this is the lesson of the *Bust and the Statue*. The stern Florentine, unbending in what he conceived to be right, preferring exile and beggary to a shameful return to his native city, the great poet, the leader of men, the ardent patriot, even the intense hater,

Dante, who loved well because he hated,

Hated wickedness that hinders loving,

was the very incarnation of that strength and power of manhood which Browning admired above all things.

That this is no mere fancy is fully shown in the poem on *Sordello*, one of the most difficult

⁵ Cf. *Inf.* iii, 69.

and obscure, yet one of the most characteristic of Browning's works.

I think there can be little doubt that Browning received the first suggestion of this poem from Dante. Sordello, an Italian troubadour who flourished in the early part of the thirteenth century, would to-day be practically unknown, but for the passages in the *Purgatorio*, and the *De Vulgari Eloquentia*. In the latter Dante praises his predecessor in the art of poetry for being one of the first of Italian poets to give up writing in the local dialect.

In the former passage he describes the meeting of Vergil and Sordello in Ante-Purgatory. The latter had looked at first upon the approaching poets with an air of supreme, yet dignified haughtiness,

In guisa di leon quando si posa;

at the mention of Mantua, however, he bestowed a warm-hearted and open-armed welcome to the

pregio eterno del loco ond'io fui.

This welcome furnishes Dante with the occasion for a magnificent outburst of indignation at the political state of Italy. These are the hints, taken by Browning, out of which he reconstructed the story of Sordello. Although he studied carefully the times and read over thirty books on the subject, yet the character of his hero is the creation of his own imagination.

In the early part of the poem there is a direct reference to Dante; Sordello is called the fore-runner of the latter, a herald-star of song, afterwards overwhelmed by the blaze of the greater genius of his successor,

For he is thine!

Sordello, thy fore-runner Florentine!
A herald-star, I know thou didst absorb,
Relentless into the consummate orb
That scared it from its right to roll along
A sempiternal path with dance and song,
Fulfilling its allotted period.
Serenest of the progeny of God—
Who yet resigns it not.

Yet Browning says he will try to separate the lesser glory of Sordello from the greater of Dante, although he feels doubtful as to his ability to do this.

Dante, pacer of the shore

Where glutted hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,
Unbitten by its whirling sulphur-spume—
Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope
Into a darkness quieted by hope;
Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye
In gracious twilights where his chosen lie,—
I would do this! If I should falter now!

The characters, the historical background,

the town and cities the whole political atmosphere of Browning's poem resembles that of the *Divine Comedy*, Mantua, with its marshy environs, Verona, Milan; the bloody strife between Guelf and Ghibeline; Eccelino da Romano, Azzo of Este, Sordello himself, and his love for Palma,

Palma, Dante spoke with in the clear
Amorous silence of the swooning sphere,
Cunizza, as he called her!

Browning treats Sordello as being what the Germans call "eine problematische natur;" a sort of Italian Hamlet of the Middle Ages. As he himself says in his dedication to Mr. Milsand, his "stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul; little else is worth study."

Just as he took the name and person of Sordello from Dante, so he undoubtedly took the hint of his character from the lines in the *Purgatorio* and *Inferno*, quoted by Mr. Lowell in his essay *Shakspeare Once More*, as giving a perfect description of Hamlet's weakness.⁶

After a careful study of this poem, I feel little doubt, in spite of its confessed obscurity, that in it Browning intended to make a contrast between Sordello and Dante. The former, like the latter, was

foremost in the regal class

Nature has broadly severed from her mass.

He was an ardent student, full of generous impulses and lofty ambitions. He, even before Dante, revolted against the artificiality and conventionality of the poetry of the Troubadours, and sought inspiration from his own heart;

⁶ "I find two passages in Dante," says he, "that contain the exactest possible definition of that habit or quality of Hamlet's mind which justifies the tragic turn of the play, and renders it natural and unavoidable from the beginning. The first is from the second canto of the *Inferno* :

E quale è quei che disvuol ciò che volle,
E per nuovi pensier cangia proposta,
Sì che del cominciar tutto si tosse;
Tal mi fec'io in quella oscura costa
Perchè pensando consumai la impresa
Che fu nel cominciar cotanto tosta."

Again, in the fifth canto of the *Purgatorio* :

Che sempre l'uomo in cui pensier rampolla
Sovra pensier, da sè dilunga il segno,
Perchè la foga l'un dell'altro insolla.

Dante was a profound metaphysician, and as in the first passage he describes and defines a certain quality of mind, so in the other he tells us its result in the character and life; namely, indecision and failure, the goal farther off at the end than at the beginning. It is remarkable how close a resemblance of thought, and even of expression, there is between the former of these quotations and a part of Hamlet's famous soliloquy: "Thus conscience (that is, consciousness) doth make cowards

of us all:

And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action."

That man, said we, tells his own joys and woes
We'll trust him. Would you have your songs entire,
Build on the human heart;

lines which in sentiment are like Dante's reply
to Buonagiunta's question,

Io mi son un che, quando
Amor mi spira, noto, ed a quel modo
Che detta dentro, vo significando.

Purg. xxiv, 52-54.

Sordello even seemed to have had a dream of
writing some day a poem of the general plan of
the *Divine Comedy*, an outline of the theme of
which he gives in his speech to Salinguerra,

I take the task
And marshall you Life's elemental masque,
Show Men, on evil or on good lay stress,
This light, this shade make prominent, suppress
All ordinary hues that softening blend
Such natures with the level. Apprehend
Which sinner is, which saint, if I allot
Hell, Purgatory, Heaven, a blaze or blot
To those you doubt concerning! I enwomb
Some wretched Friedrich with his red-hot tomb;
Some dubious spirit, Lombard Agilulph
With the black chastening river I engulf!
Some unapproached Matilda I enshrine
With languors of the planet of decline, etc.

Sordello, like Dante, had a true conception
of the importance of developing the national
language. In his dreams of the great things he
should do some day,

Language, that makeshft, grew
Into a bravest of expedients, too.

So, also, in the terrible chaos of civil war which
crushed the very life out of hapless Italy, Sor-
dello saw an opportunity of becoming a leader
of men, a glorious task for one who could bring
harmony and peace out of the conflicting par-
ties. He was born,

With the new century, beside the glow
And effervescence out of barbarism.

He had an earnest desire to serve his country,
a clear vision of truth, splendid gifts of mind
and soul. Yet all these lofty qualities were ren-
dered vain by the one "mask of leprosy" with-
in him: his vacillation, his weakness of will,
his inveterate habit of dreaming instead of
doing.

While Dante, fifty years later, founded the
Italian language, wrote one of the greatest
poems in the world's literature, suffered pov-
erty and exile for the sake of his political doc-
trines, Sordello did nothing. His life was spent
in dreams: he dreamed of forming a new lan-
guage; he dreamed of becoming a great poet;
he dreamed of political power, of becoming the
"Monarch of the World." But when the time
for action came, all the baseless fabric of these

visions faded away, leaving "not a wrack be-
hind."

The Body, the Machine for acting will
Had been at the commencement proved unfit,
and so it came to pass that instead of accom-
plishing his dreams, instead of becoming the
founder of a language, a leader of men, and a
great world-poet:

As knight, Bard, Gallant, men were never dumb
In praise of him: while what he should have been,
Could be and was not the one step too mean
For him to take, we suffer at this day
Because of: Eccelin had pushed away
Its chance ere Dante could arrive and take
That step Sordello spurned, for the world's sake:
He did much, but Sordello's chance was gone.

The most beautiful of Browning's allusions
to Dante occurs in the *One Word More*. In
the *New Life* Dante tells how on the anniver-
sary of Beatrice's death, he sat drawing an
angel *sopra certe tavolette*, but was interrupted
by the presence of certain men, *a' quali si con-*
venia di fare onore. Browning cites this as an
example of that deep desire of a lover's heart
to do something out of the ordinary for the be-
loved one. Raphael the painter had written a
book of sonnets for *la Fornarina*; so Dante
the poet, drew an angel for Beatrice.

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:
Whom to please? You whisper 'Beatrice.'
While he mused and traced it and retraced it
(Peradventure with a pen corroded
Still by drops of that hot ink he dipped for,
When, his left hand i' the hair o' the wicked,
Back he held the brow and pricked its stigma,
Bit into the live man's flesh for parchment,
Loosed him, laughed to see the writing rangle,
Let the wretch go festering through Florence)—
Dante, who loved well because he hated,
Hated wickedness that hinders loving,
Dante standing, studying his angel,—
In there broke the folk of his Inferno.
Says he—"certain people of importance"
(Such he gave his daily, dreadful line to)
"Entered and would seize, forsooth, the poet."
Says the poet, "then I stopped my painting."

VI.

You and I would rather see that angel,
Painted by the tenderness of Dante,
Would we not? than read a fresh Inferno.

VIII.

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?
This: no artist lives and loves that longs not
Once, and only once, and for one only
(Oh, the prize!) to find his love a language
Fit and fair and simple and sufficient—
Using nature that's an art to others,
Not, this one time, art that's turned his nature.

The conclusion of the poem, and the application
of the above to his own love for Mrs. Browning
is very beautiful.

XVIII.

This I say of me, but think of you Love!
 This to you—yourself my moon of poets!
 Oh, but that's the world's side, there's the wonder—
 Thus they see you, praise you, think they know you!
 There, in turn, I stand with them and praise you!
 Out of my own self, I dare to phrase it.
 But the best is when I glide from out them,
 Cross a step or two of dubious twilight,
 Come out on the other side, the novel
 Silent, silver lights and darks undreamed of,
 Where I hush and bless myself with silence.

XIX.

Oh, their Rafael of the dear Madonnas,
 Oh, their Dante of the dread Inferno,
 Wrote one song—and in my brain I sing it,
 Drew one angel—borne, see, on my bosom.

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TWO NOTELETS ON SHAKESPEARE.

I.

Lucrece 183 f.

"Here pale with fear he doth premeditate
 The dangers of his loathsome enterprise,
 And in his inward mind he doth debate
 What following sorrow may on this arise:
 Then looking scornfully, he doth despise
 His naked armour of still-slaughter'd lust,
 And justly thus controls his thoughts unjust."

One line of this stanza, "His naked armour of still-slaughter'd lust" (text of the Globe edition), is, at first sight, obscure in meaning. Both "naked armour," and "still-slaughter'd" (the hyphen is Malone's) require comment. "Zwischen 'naked' = waffenlos, and 'armour' besteht eine Antithese," is the common-place observation of Delius, who also accepts the questionable hyphen and defines "still-slaughtered" by "stets erwürgt," adding "Er verschmäht die schwache Rüstung seiner Wollust, die stets Niederlagen erleidet." Schmidt sees in the epithet "naked" "a play upon the word," and in "armour" a figurative use. Putting his two assumptions together, one must infer the meaning to be that Tarquin regards himself as armed for lust in being (in the military sense) unarmed, even naked (not only of armour, but also literally). As a soldier he may well be supposed to "despise" an enterprise of violence in which the legitimated means of defence are not to be employed (compare "How he in peace is wounded, not in war," 831).

But Tarquin has turned logician: "in his mind he doth debate," "revolving the sundry dangers of his will's obtaining" (128). In one mood he would fain defend his lawless desire

by argument; he would put armour on his ears and on his eyes (compare *Timon* iv, 3, 23) and on his heart and mind, and 'not let the virgin's cheek make soft his trenchant sword.' In another mood the counter-argument prevails:

"I have debated, even in my soul,
 What wrong, what shame, what sorrow I shall breed."
 [498-499].

When in this frame of mind lust is for the moment overcome, it is felled *dead*, slaughtered *still* (adj.); and the contemplation of the heavy curse consequent upon shameless crime momentarily 'tires him more than all the complete armour he might wear' (compare *Richard III*, iv, 4, 189). He now sees and "despises" the flimsiness of his argument in favor of lust, his "naked" *argument*, his "naked armour." But soon afterwards, in a recurrence of the first mood, this "naked armour" proves effective, and virtue subdued retires herself from the conflict; her pleadings are dismissed as "an old man's saw" (244), inasmuch as "my part is youth" (278).

II.

Sonnet i, 13-14.

"Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
 To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee."

Tyler's note is as follows:

"*The world's due* is the perpetuation of Mr. W. H's beauty. If he fails to leave children behind him, he will co-operate with the grave, destined thus to consume not only his body, but to cut off also all hope of posterity. But it depends on Mr. W. H. himself whether the grave shall exert its full power; and so what the grave consumes Mr. W. H. may be regarded as himself consuming, like a glutton."

This coöperation with the grave in devouring the world's due is thus expressed in Hudson's note: "To eat what is due to the world, by *burying thyself*, that is, by leaving no posterity, seems to be the meaning." Dowden, too, holds to substantially the same interpretation, but is somewhat more logical in distributing the agency:

"Pity the world, or else be a glutton devouring the world's due, by means of the grave (which will swallow your beauty) and of yourself, who refuse to beget offspring."

The figure of gluttony as assumed in these interpretations is supported by Dowden's citation from *All's Well* I, 1, 54: "Virginity . . . consumes itself to the very paring, and so dies with feeding his own stomach." A further confirmation might have been sought in the coincidence between the same passage in *All's Well*, "Keep it not; you cannot choose but